

Media Release

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Homelessness support founder named 2026 Mid North Coast Volunteer of the Year

Dignity Dishes volunteer and homelessness services advocate Lea Lloyd has been named the 2026 Mid North Coast Volunteer of the Year, for her tireless work to protect people from the impacts of hunger and homelessness across the region.

Lea was recognised today at the 2026 NSW Volunteer of Year Awards at the Westport Club at Port Macquarie.

The NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards are hosted by The Centre for Volunteering to help promote and support volunteering across NSW. The Awards are now in their 20th year and celebrate the work of thousands of individuals and volunteer teams from a diverse range of organisations across the state.

Other individual and team awards were also announced today:

Mid North Coast Young Volunteer of the Year: Lilly De Belle from Port Macquarie

Uni student Lilly De Belle is a rescue watercraft operator, assistant trainer, fundraiser and public relations officer with Marine Rescue NSW at Port Macquarie.

She gives her time to keep the boating community safe on the water and informed of conditions and operations, as well as training new recruits and raising money to support the unit's operations.

Mid North Coast Adult Volunteer of the Year: Lea Lloyd from Port Macquarie

Lea helped found the Mid North Coast arm of the homelessness support organisation Dignity Dishes, providing free, nutritious meals to people facing financial hardship or at risk of homelessness.

She has also been the Club Secretary for Sunrise Rotary for more than seven years, where she manages club administration, membership records, meeting minutes, and liaises with other organisations.

Mid North Coast Senior Volunteer of the Year: Gary White from Port Macquarie

Gary has been a leading volunteer at Marine Rescue NSW Port Macquarie for more than a decade, performing hundreds of rescues, mentoring many colleagues and managing multiple radio bases.

His extensive volunteer work includes flood and fire liaison with other emergency and defence force organisations, as well as operating rescue craft and leading training activity.

Mid North Coast Emergency Volunteer of the Year: BlazeAid Mid Coast Flood Response, Nambucca

Bob and Lisa Abdoo led the BlazeAid Mid Coast Flood Response team, helping 179 farmers to recover from the devastating impacts of the 2025 floods that hit the region.

They set up at the Bulahdelah BlazeAid Basecamp, coordinating a group of 300 volunteers who rolled up their sleeves to provide fencing, infrastructure repair and recovery support to local farmers and the community.

They managed the equivalent of 5,700 days of volunteer work, helping to rebuild 260 km of fencing across 125 farms and allowing a return to productive farming.

Mid North Coast Volunteer Team of the Year: The Community Transport Company Volunteer Team

The 220 members of the Toormina based North Coast Community Transport Company Volunteer Team provide essential transport services for vulnerable groups across the region.

Their volunteer work ensures people can attend lifesaving health care appointments like dialysis, oncology treatments, specialist appointments and other essential healthcare.

They ensure their clients can complete their shopping and participate in social activity or overnight appointments, helping to reduce social isolation and loneliness.

The Centre for Volunteering CEO Gemma Rygate said volunteers from across the Mid North Coast give so much to the local community.

“Volunteers help build strong and healthy communities across the state,” Ms Rygate said.

“They are always there when we need them most, giving their time and support across all areas of life including health, emergency services, education and community sectors.

“Volunteers are role models for others, highlighting how volunteering can have such a positive impact on people and places. These awards celebrate the volunteering effort and impact.”

The NSW Minister with responsibility for Volunteering, Jodie Harrison said:

“Congratulations to our everyday heroes, the winners of the Mid North Coast Volunteer of the Year Awards.

“From the bush to the sea, volunteers are the true heartbeat of our communities. Thank you for your invaluable contributions. You make New South Wales the best state to live in.

“In partnership with the Centre for Volunteering, the NSW Government continues to build a sector that is strong and diverse, and to make sure volunteers like you are recognised for and supported in what you do.”

Mid North Coast award recipients will be invited to represent their region at the State Gala Award Ceremony at the end of the year, where the NSW Volunteer of the Year in each category will be announced.



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About the NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards

The NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards are in their 20th year and have grown to become one of the largest celebrations of volunteering across Australia.

They are an annual program run by The Centre for Volunteering to recognise the outstanding work of volunteers and Leaders of Volunteers in every region across NSW.

Individuals or teams can be nominated in one of seven award categories:

- Young Volunteer of the Year – sponsored by the Minister for Youth – Hon Rose Jackson
- Adult Volunteer of the Year
- Senior Volunteer of the Year
- Volunteer Team of the Year
- Emergency Volunteer of the Year – sponsored by the Minister for Emergency Services – Hon Jihad Dib
- Not-for-Profit Voluntary Governance Award
- Volunteer Leader of the Year

Twenty-five regional ceremonies are held in towns and suburbs throughout NSW from mid-August until November.

The regional finalists will be invited to a Gala State ceremony in December in Sydney where the NSW Volunteer of Year is announced. Recipients for the NSW Volunteer of the Year are also announced across the seven categories.

The Awards are run by the Centre for Volunteering. The NSW Government is the principal partner for the awards.



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